

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS INFORMATION

You have experienced a traumatic event or a critical incident (any event that causes unusually strong emotional reactions that have the potential to interfere with the ability to function normally). Even though the event may be over, you may now be experiencing or may experience later, some strong emotional or physical reactions. It is very common, in fact quite **normal**, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have passed through a horrible event.

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) appear immediately after the traumatic event. Sometimes they may appear a few hours or a few days later. And, in some cases, weeks or months may pass before the stress reactions appear.

The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks, a few months, or longer, depending on the severity of the traumatic event. The understanding and the support of loved ones usually cause the stress reactions to pass more quickly. Occasionally, the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance may be necessary. This does not imply craziness or weakness. It simply indicates that the particular event was just too powerful for the person to manage by himself.

Common Signs and Signals of Stress Reactions

<u>Physical</u>	<u>Cognitive</u>	<u>Emotional</u>	<u>Behavioral</u>
Chills thirst	Confusion	Fear	Withdrawal
Fatigue	Nightmares	Guilt	Antisocial acts
Nausea	Uncertainty	Grief	Inability to rest
Fainting	Hypervigilance	Panic	Intensified pacing
Twitches	Suspiciousness	Denial	Erratic movements
Vomiting	Intrusive images	Anxiety	Change in social activity
Dizziness	Blaming someone	Agitation	Change in speech patterns
Weakness	Poor problem solving	Irritability	Loss or increase of appetite
Chest pain	Poor abstract thinking	Depression	Hyper-alert to environment
Headaches	Poor attention/ decisions	Intense anger	Increased alcohol consumption
Elevated BP	Poor concentration/memory	Apprehension	Change in usual communications etc...
Rapid heart rate	Disorientation of time, place or person	Emotional shock	
Muscle tremors	Difficulty identifying objects or people	Emotional outbursts	
Shock symptoms	Heightened or lowered alertness	Feeling overwhelmed	
Grinding of teeth	Increased or decreased awareness of surroundings etc...	Loss of emotional control	
Visual difficulties		Inappropriate emotional response etc...	
Profuse sweating			
Difficulty breathing			
Lack of appetite			
Etc...			

Examples of Associative/Environmental (Sensory Triggers):

Fuels (Jet A, saw gas, diesel, drip torch, etc.)	Helicopters	Radio Traffic	Tree Branches
Smoke)	Smokejumper Aircraft	Fire Alarms	Branches
Thunderstorms	Air Tanker	Yelling/Loud Voices	
Wind	Aircraft	Retardant/Foam	
Fireline	Chainsaws	Intense heat	
	Pumps	Thunder	
	Engines		

While Many of These Signs and Signals are Normal, Seek Immediate Professional Attention if they Persist or Become Overwhelming!

THINGS TO TRY:

- WITHIN THE FIRST 24 - 48 HOURS periods of appropriate physical exercise, alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Structure your time; keep busy.
- You're normal and having normal reactions; don't label yourself crazy.
- Talk to people; talk is the most healing medicine.
- Be aware of *numbing* the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol, you don't need to complicate this with a substance abuse problem.
- Reach out; people do care.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- Spend time with others.
- Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with others.
- Keep a journal; write your way through those sleepless hours.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Realize those around you are under stress.
- Don't make any big life changes.
- Do make as many daily decisions as possible that will give you a feeling of control over your life, i.e., if someone asks you what you want to eat, answer him even if you're not sure.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Don't try to fight reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks - they are normal and will decrease over time and become less painful.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).

FOR FAMILY MEMBERS & FRIENDS

- Listen carefully.
- Spend time with the traumatized person.
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear if (s)he has not asked for help.
- Reassure him that he is safe.
- Help him with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family, minding children.
- Give him some private time.
- Don't take his anger or other feelings personally.
- Don't tell him that he is "lucky it wasn't worse;" a traumatized person is not consoled by those statements. Instead, tell him that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and assist him.